

# Breastfeeding During the Cold & Flu Season

Many mothers wonder what to do when they get a cold or the flu (influenza). Should you stop breastfeeding? What remedies or medications are okay to use?

## Is it okay to breastfeed your baby if YOU get a cold or the flu?

Absolutely. Neither a cold or the flu are spread to infants through breast milk. Breastfeeding will actually pass antibodies to your baby that will protect your baby. Drink plenty of fluids and rest while you are recovering. If possible, when you are ill, ask healthy family members or friends to help you care for your baby. This will limit your baby's exposure to your illness.

Influenza viruses spread mainly by droplets when people with the flu cough, sneeze or talk. If you are diagnosed with influenza, please take the following precautions recommended by the Centers for Disease Control. Follow these precautions when you have any flu symptoms, and for 24 hours after your symptoms clear up, to avoid spreading the flu to your baby:

- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you sneeze or cough, and put your used tissues in a wastebasket.
- Wash your hands with soap and water, or use an alcohol-based hand cleaner, frequently - immediately after you sneeze or cough on your hands, and before caring for your baby, or touching your baby's toys, pacifier, feeding supplies, etc.
- See more information about hand washing hygiene at <https://www.cdc.gov/flu/protect/habits/index.htm>

If you are too sick to feed your baby at your breast, express your milk and have a healthy family member feed your pumped milk to your baby via a bottle or a cup. Wash your hands well with soap and water before pumping or handling your milk.

## What remedies can you take to help with cold and flu symptoms?

Most over-the-counter cold and flu remedies have not been proven to be very effective. If you choose to take cold or flu remedies, the amount that passes into your milk is usually very small and unlikely to affect your baby. However, pseudoephedrine, a common decongestant in Sudafed, DayQuil, NyQuil and Theraflu, may cause a decrease in your milk supply. It can decrease prolactin, the main hormone involved in making milk.

When you are ill, drink lots of fluids (water, hot lemon tea, soup), get plenty of rest, and take hot baths or showers. Sleep will help your body recover, and fluids will help you feel better and decrease congestion. You may use a nasal saline irrigation (e.g. NeilMed Sinus Rinse or a neti pot), suck on throat lozenges, or use a zinc oral mist (e.g. Zicam). These are all local or topical treatments. If you have body aches and/or a fever, you may take ibuprofen (Motrin) and/or acetaminophen (Tylenol). If a cough is keeping you from sleeping, you may take dextromethorphan, a cough suppressant (Robitussin DM). *Do not exceed the recommended doses on any of the above medications.*



## Community Breastfeeding Center

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(402) 502-0617

For additional  
information:  
[www.milkworks.org](http://www.milkworks.org)

Visit with your doctor or other health care professional. If you have influenza, your doctor may prescribe an antiviral medication for you. Tamiflu, a treatment for influenza A and B, is safe for breastfeeding mothers to use, but it must be administered by a physician within two days of infection and it only shortens the duration of the flu by about 36 hours.

### **Is it okay for your baby to breastfeed if your baby is sick with a cold or the flu?**

Yes, it is more than okay - it is best for your baby! Breast milk is the perfect nutrition and hydration for your baby and is full of protective antibodies. In addition, babies are comforted by breastfeeding - which is especially helpful when they are not feeling well. Fluids are very important for a baby when they are ill. Your breast milk is the perfect fluid for your baby.

### **Is it okay for you to obtain a flu vaccination while breastfeeding?**

Yes, you may have a flu shot. (As of June 2016, the Centers for Disease Control no longer recommends the nasal spray flu vaccine due to lack of effectiveness.)

### **Can your baby have a flu vaccination?**

Only if your baby is six months or older. Before six months of age, breastfeeding is the best way to help your baby's immune system fight infections and viruses, like influenza. Breastfed babies are less likely to get sick and are less likely to experience severe cold or flu symptoms.

**Please note:** MilkWorks is a well-child facility. If you, or your baby, have had cold or flu symptoms in the past 24 hours, please re-schedule your visit to MilkWorks. Please call us at (402) 423-6402 in Lincoln or (402) 502-0617 in Omaha and we will gladly answer any questions you have until you and your baby are well.

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